In Memoriam.

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THE CHRISTIAN HOME.

A SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. M. G. KITTREDGE,

Preached in the Eliot Church, Boston Highlands, April 22, 1883.

By REV. A. C. THOMPSON, D. D.

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"Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day; for it was about the tenth hour."—JOHN 1 : 38, 39.

IF THE last words of eminent personages and of dying friends have a special interest, are not the first official words of distinguished characters also entitled to particular regard? Messiah has come. Formal introduction to his public life has taken place. On the banks of the Jordan the adorable Trinity has been manifested sensibly.— The Father, speaking audibly as the Holy Spirit descends visibly upon the beloved Son. The heaven-appointed herald has reiterated his announcement,—a proclamation more unique and more weighty than any other recorded in the annals of time,—"Behold the Lamb of God!" "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" What will be the earliest utterance of Him who is the Eternal Word made

flesh, now that his ministry is inaugurated? Two men, John and Andrew, who had heard the forerunner's message, start to follow Jesus. They are in want of something. He, turning, "saith unto them, What seek ye?" And to an inquiry of theirs, he replies, "Come and see."

Christ at home is the need of every human heart. The reason is, men are ill at ease; man as a moral being, wanders He has the perverse heart of the prodigal. To God our heavenly Father—his interests, his laws, his ways—there is an instinctive dislike, and this alienation drives him into the land of wandering whither Cain went. No companionship, no surroundings can compensate for this isolation, this vagabondism of the heart. Many enjoyments, mental and animal, there may indeed be; high æsthetic and social delights there may be; by a self blinding process, and by intense industry, man may become largely insensible to his greatest need; but there is in him after all an element of deep unrest. It has but to force its way to the surface, and mighty heavings will take place; showers of ashes and an overflow of lava will cover his fair heritage.

Awaking to the misery of such desolation, he raves wildly, or sullenly repines, or melts into

bitter tears,—though, like Esau, weeping for what he has lost, not that he foolishly sold a birthright. That which he sought, that which he still seeks, is not God, but God's good gifts, and freedom in a selfish enjoyment of them.

If now, one is led to see the sinfulness of all this; if at the same time there comes to his ear that wondrous word, "Behold the Lamb of God;" if obediently, longingly, he looks unto Jesus, great quiet ensues. The peace of God which passeth all understanding, begins to keep the mind and heart. The soul now has a home. God has become the soul of soul. The heart needs a heart larger, tenderer than itself; and none save Immanuel can meet this great want. Yes, it is all through Christ Jesus, who in the greatness of his grace, with his efficacious blood, is at hand to remove guilt, and wash away stains. The pardoned disciple becomes domesticated with the Master. No longer "without God in the world," he is now "in Christ Jesus," at home with him, the Elder Brother, at his hearthstone.

Christ invites us thus to make it home with him. Jesus said unto them, "What seek ye?" they say unto him, "Where dwellest thou?" he saith unto them, "Come and see." Yes, all are

bidden; the door is wide open; there is room enough, bread enough and to spare.

Among founders and masters, Christ is the most exclusive in his claims, but infinitely the most catholic in his invitation. He has a perfect title to every human soul, with all its affections and aspirations, to have and to hold the same forever. His heart, however, goes out no less broadly than his right extends. Every race,—Jewish or Gentile—every grade of culture—Greek or Barbarian—every social condition—freeman or bondservant—is equally included.

A more especial earnestness goes into his words whenever sincere inquirers are near. He will not fail to pause, to turn himself, and to ask, "What seek ye?" Though kingly in position, he feels the most tender, the most genuine interest. However timid the seekers, however unworthy, however destitute of testimonials and letters of recommendation, one step toward the Saviour, and his eye is caught; his lips are opened. Avowal of discipleship is not prerequisite to a welcome. "Come and see," meets the faintest desire. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him," can hardly be breathed from a disquieted heart, before "Come and see" is heard; for in his ear thoughts speak as loud as do words.

Come and see for yourself, is his offer, and this is not more the utterance of love than an appeal to common sense. Make proof of my sincerity; see whether there is sufficiency. I do not invite you to come by and bye, nor merely to the neighborhood, but come at once. come within doors, and sup with me; summer and winter with me. What inquiring sinner ever accepted the invitation—penitently, yet otherwise than as a penance; not simply dreading wrath to come, but drawn by present loving kindness—what inquirer ever thus accepted the invitation, and met with disappointment? Who need fail of leaning where the beloved disciple leaned, and with unutterable content?

Without Christ the literal home is incomplete. As with the individual so with the household, though vital piety be wanting, great enjoyments and invaluable results may be realized. Based upon a divine ordinance, the family, when rightly constituted and wisely administered, is a beautiful and beneficent institution; the abode of delicate and refining relationships; of pure and ennobling affections. Tones of tenderness, sweet maternal music, are heard there, such as go down to the depths of the soul, and abide with lasting power. Around any spot that de-

serves the name of home, mighty influences cluster. There is a nursery of good habits, of virtue, of patriotism; there is the chief secret of that which gilds drudgery; which nerves the soldier's heart; which cheers the seaman in his perils; which weaves a spell stretching across oceans and continents.

But let the true law and dignity of marriage be disregarded; let divorce be made easy; let polygamy, or concubinage prevail, and home is extinct; the family is in ruins. You may have looked into Indian *tee-pees*, and seen what are called families of savages, herding much like cattle, and with habits modelled after the stable. You may have visited Hindoo houses where the man eats alone, where the wife attends upon him in servile deference, and when the lordly master of the establishment has finished his repast, the timid woman, taking her share to another apartment, eats in silence; and when a daughter is born, it is an occasion of grief and shame. What has effected the broad contrast between such habitations and hundreds of habitations with which you are acquainted, in this community, where, though no domestic altar and no "church in the house" is to be found, there yet are good order, right social

sentiments, and, in general, a healthful atmosphere? The Bible has done it. By inculcating purity, by fortifying the sanctity of marriage, by elevating woman, by silently reforming morals, legislation and literature, it furnishes the world samples of a comparative charm and of sanctity in domestic relations.

The highest type of home life however, is to be found only within doors where Christ has entered. He alone, who honored the scene at Cana of Galilee, who himself sought a hallowed refuge at Bethany, can mould and lift the family to that high rank of attractiveness and religious power which its founder contemplated. Where paschal blood has been sprinkled on the lintel and door posts; where the heavenly salutation, Peace be to you, has been uttered; where songs of the domestic Zion are often heard; where sweet incense is burned morning and evening; where the flow of pure and pious affections is seldom checked; where all reasonable demands of reciprocity are met; where delicate thoughtfulness and uncomplaining self-sacrifice reign; where is much of joyous freedom, but no heedless indulgence; where, in short, God, our heavenly Father, is all in all, there is the acme of moral beauty, and of bliss on earth.

Such a habitation is one with which the architect and decorator has little to do. It may be a palace, it may be a hovel; or it may be an unsheltered halting place beneath the sky, it is still a Bethel; a sacred spot; and well may wanderers pour oil on that rude stone where the head has rested. The Christian home, be its surroundings and fittings what they may, is the spot where Jesus Christ dwells, where his love gilds and governs all. No wonder that, after seeing where Jesus dwelt, and spending that season with him, Andrew should be in haste to bring his brother Simon there too, exclaiming, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." No wonder that Tertullian, one of the Christian Fathers, born a heathen, should, toward the close of the second century, write: "What a union is that between believers, having in common one hope, one desire, one order of life, one service of the Lord! Both like brother and sister, undivided in spirit or body, nay, in the true sense twain in one flesh, kneel, pray and fast together, mutually teach, exhort and bear with each other; they share in each others troubles, persecutions, joys; neither has anything to hide from the other; the harmony of

psalms, and hymns goes up between them; Christ rejoices to behold and hear such things, and sends them his peace."

The Christian home here is a type of the home hereafter. Whatever other imagery may be employed—country, city with varied embellishments—the most distinctive and fitting idea is, that our future abode will be a home, a home for the soul; all that is now defective being removed, and all that is essentially characteristic and attractive being heightened indefinitely.

Here on earth is there any place where such happy and needful culture can be had as in the religious family? However teachers may instruct, parents must educate. A certain training is indispensable, which can be had nowhere else. What can make good the want of domestic worship, domestic study of God's word, and other peculiar influences—especially the evident presence of him who invites to his lodging—which go to make up an atmosphere wholly unique in this world? Nothing else can fill the place. Wichern, Amelia Sieveking, and other deeply religious men and women, who have established the best reformatories for the young, have been governed in their plans by the princi-

ple that the family is a divine appointment, and that the Christian home should be reproduced, as nearly as possible, in behalf of young criminals. There must be a father of the family, a house-mother, family prayers with singing, and in general, the nearest practicable approach to the spirit and habits of religious domesticity. Results confirm the wisdom of such proceedings.

The central charm and glory of a Christian home lie in the scope given to all the best and purest affections, of which man, under the power of divine grace is capable, and in the highest degree. That it is which makes the spot more an Eden than any other. O, what blessed subordination is there! What sweet and sometimes heroic reciprocal ministries!

O, the deep delights of mutual confidence and affectionate familiarity! Have you never on entering a room, been attracted irresistibly by a lovely picture on the wall,—a landscape or a social group,—and for the time been beguiled into the impression that there was an actual nook of Paradise? Long years ago, I had acquaintance at a German University, with a Jewish student of medicine. He was a sceptic. I pictured to him the New England home, where parents and children form a

harmonious, conscientious, contented band, among whom gentle and joyous offices, and endearments abound. Especially did I endeavor to set before him the indescribable delights of an evening of the Lord's Day, "the queen of days, the pearl of the week," when all the hallowed influences of the Sabbath concentrate, when serenest light from above shines upon the group, when the flow of parental, filial and other attachments is strongest, and most thoroughly clarified, when, indeed, a family here below sits together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The hardened man's bosom heaved with strong emotion,—the only time that I saw him show emotion,—and he burst into tears, saying, "I had no idea there was any such thing on earth."

Ah! there are thousands of such; yet while such a spot is the nearest approach to heaven, that can be found under heaven, after all, the miniature is much blurred; itis a faded photograph. And then how soon is the little sanctuary broken up. So far as concerns period, it is only an inn. "The wayfaring man turneth aside to tarry for a night." But in and with Christ Jesus, the soul is to abide,—to abide for ever. That, that only is home.

The Christian's walk is toward the heavenly home. Byways, alas, are sometimes entered; the course is apt to be more or less circuitous; still the issue of wanderings, temptations, struggles is, through plenitude of divine grace, advance on the whole. By land or sea, going east or west, the believer may be always said to be facing toward heaven. He steers by a star in the firmament above. He is homeward bound anyway. And how it cheers amid weariness, darkness and perils! When Alexander was about moving on a distant expedition he divided his patrimonial estate among his friends; one of them inquired, "And what, O King, do you reserve for yourself?" "My hopes," replied the monarch. Whatever the Christian may voluntarily part with, or may lose, he can never be otherwise than rich,—rich beyond estimate. Hope brings wealth to the needy, freedom to the captive, health to the diseased, society to the solitary. Hope unbolts the prison door, comes with a life-boat to the shipwrecked, and lifts her bright arch behind the retiring thunder cloud.

Spiritual vision grows clearer and clearer, the inspiration stronger and stronger. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place—our home—in all

generations." To have him, so that one can say "Thou art my God," is to possess all that is worth having; Himself is his own greatest gift. But there are degrees of his conscious presence. "It is good for me to draw near unto God"—to draw nearer and nearer unto God, until with David Brainerd, it can be said "I know that I long for God and a conformity to his will, in inward purity and holiness, ten thousand times more than for anything here below." In the course of creation, the last thing done by God, the crowning work, was to set up his own image in the soul of man: the reproduction of that which was lost, is a finishing work—a master piece of divine skill that goes on and on. Perfect love reigns at length where once were slavish and guilty fears. Holy and reverent fear, indeed, abides, but the child of God is no longer afraid. Filial assurance saith, as to the patriarch of Uz, "Thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin." I once saw a Christian family go through dangerous rapids. The steamer seemed about to dash, now upon a rock on the right, now upon one on the left; every beam and plank quivered; the whole craft writhed and groaned; destruction

seemed inevitable. But the father stood on deck, firm and serene, looking upward. To him clung the wife and mother confidingly; to them both clung the children. All went through safely, and were soon landed at home. Thus goes many a family on their way to the desired haven.

Is any believer to be blamed for wishing to depart and be with Christ; for not finding it always quite easy to be resigned to live longer here? "Blessed are they," wrote Jung Stilling, "Blessed are they that are homesick, for they shall get home." The very existence of such longing as to be homesick for heaven, is a prophecy and proof of a better abode on high. The blessed correlative must be a reality. Pilgrims of earth, young and old, do well to cherish such aspirations. At the age of seventeen, a daughter* once wrote to her father: "Each night when retiring to rest, my heart is gladdened with the thought, 'One day nearer to my Father's Kingdom, and my heavenly home!'" Would that such a sweetly solemn thought might come to every one!

The Christian's departure hence is only arrival home. The transit may be sudden, occasioned

*Miss Ann Bacon.

either by violence, or by the unnoticed progress of disease. A minister, after preaching earnestly on the Sabbath, was the next day told by the physician that he could live but a few hours Clasping his hands, and raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed, "Oh, my gracious God! I did not know that I was so near home!" One may slip away even instantaneously, in the midst of sleep, from a dormitory here to our Father's house—as did a sister of ours so quietly just three months ago.* Or some days may be occupied in taking down the tabernacle of a man in the meridian of life and usefulness, as just three weeks ago to-day, was the case with an officer of this church.† Often—how proverbially often!—are young feet, long before the time for graduation from the fireside seminary, transferred to a household infinitely safer, infinitely better than the best on earth. Old men find their strength gone; but then, is it not "about the tenth hour of the day?" One's journey ended, the body, like a mantle worn thin, may well be dropped. It is no longer needed, when, after this night of time, the sunrise of another world has come. Transcendent

*Mrs. William H. Wardwell, Jan. 24.
†Dea. Andrew Marshall, April 1.

hour! Joy to departing believers! The fact of getting home should fill the thoughts of one going, and of those tarrying behind. "I am going home," said a Christian mother,* and heaving a gentle sigh, she was there. "Oh that home! No more sin, nor sorrow, nor restlessness!" said a missionary's wife as she was about going up amidst the mountains of Persia;† and so it is with thousands of believers every year.

Is it not well for us to fasten thought, not upon the inconvenience, the roughness, the chill of the passage, but upon what meets the saint beyond? I once saw the snow so piled by a tempest around my father's dwelling, as to overtop the doors, and an entrance had to be arched through the drift; but then, there were warm hearts and a warm hearthstone within Let him hesitate about going hence who is loath to see spring take the place of winter; loath to leave a stormy sea, for a quiet harbor; loath to leave the beggar's cot for Abraham's bosom; loath to exchange a partial for a perfect paradise. Aye, let that one hesitate and shudder, who would keep away from the celestial Bethany; who would not see Christ face to face; who would not behold his glory.

* Mrs. Elizabeth Chase, 1798.
† Mrs. M. A. Rhea.

One more of our number, after a pilgrimage of fourscore years, has reached home.*

Her girlhood was one of gaiety; but the first general and powerful revival in Park Street Church, (1823,) which added about ninety converts to its membership, numbered her and two of her sisters among them. The transformation of character and life was marked. From that time forward, for just sixty years, Christ and his church had a large place in her heart. Of the original members of the Eliot Church, there is but one now living, and living among us,† though even she at present seeks a milder climate, two thousand miles away.

Not one who hears me to-day has personal recollections of the course of things in this neighborhood, so long ago as 1834 and earlier. At that time no Orthodox Congregational Church could be found nearer than Pine Street, Boston, the Second Church, Dorchester, the First Church, Dedham, and Brighton Church—limits within which are now not less than fifteen churches of the same faith and order. It was before the date just given that our deceased sister came to this place. So strong, at that

*Mrs. Mehitable Grozier Kittredge, born in Truro, Barnstable County, Feb. 28, 1803.

†Mrs. Mary J. Basford.

period, was the feeling of opposition to a movement looking towards the organization of an evangelical church, that persons in going to the place of worship, were sometimes stoned by certain lewd fellows of the baser sort.

Worship was first, and for some time, held in a hall. To break ground at a time when the population was so small, and a want of sympathy in the enterprise so great, proved an arduous undertaking. Alvah Kittredge and his wife were prominent in the little band who worked and prayed many months before it was deemed best to call a council to consider the question of forming a church. That council, when called, Pastors and Delegates, was entertained at the home of our departed sister. Thence onward, a large hospitality was exercised. Not unfrequently theological students were guests, among whom, for weeks, was Henry Lyman, afterwards one of the two martyred missionaries in Sumatra. Often was the door opened to ministers and missionaries. My own first home here was under that roof, which served to make the morning of a pastoral life which began a little over forty years ago, bright with beams that have not yet lost their cheer. Many a committee meeting was held there, many a prayer

meeting, many a Dorcas gathering; often too, the Maternal Association, with an attendance sometimes of sixty persons; and the meetings of that Association were attended by the eldest daughter of the family till the month of her marriage. The six children who reached adult years, were successively welcomed in the mother's presence, to this church, while the one who died in early boyhood, at the age of four years,* gave unusual evidence of piety. It was her privilege to look upon twenty-one grandchildren, all of whom have received the seal of that righteousness that is by faith, and who, with two exceptions, are alive to-day. Of all members of this church—over one thousand and four hundred† from the first onward—how many have been more loyal to its interests; have labored more assiduously to promote its welfare, been more uniformly present at its devotional meetings, or taken active part more readily in its exercises? For twenty-five years her husband was the indefatigable Superintendent of our Sabbath School. That school and one of their children were born on the same day.‡ The father just welcomed the infant son, now a

* Charles H. Kittredge, April 4, 1834.
† 1425.
‡ July 20, 1834.

prominent minister at the West,* and then hastened to welcome into being this twin child which, in part, bears the same name—the Eliot Sabbath School. For over forty years her husband served this church as a faithful office-bearer,† and while of the thirteen who have held the same office, more than half are deceased, five widows of these brethren are still living.

Mrs. Kittredge's married life fell short only one year of being half a century. The home test is the chief test. If you had been guests, for any time, at the house on Highland Street, you would have been satisfied that He who bade John and Andrew "Come and see" was an inmate there. On His day you would never see a secular book or paper in her hand. That day was to her "a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable." Especially near was He in the room to which she retired every morning, and every night about nine o'clock, for prayer—a habit which was continued to the last. Whoever the visitor, or whatever the urgency of other claims, she would not intermit this practice. Very naturally, "Sweet hour of

* Rev. Abbott Eliot Kittredge, D. D., of Chicago.
† Died June 10, 1876.

prayer," became a favorite hymn. For the last few months of life another favorite was:

"I know not the way I am going,
But well do I know my Guide;
With a child-like trust I give my hand
To the mighty Friend by my side;
The only thing that I say to Him,
As He takes it, is, Hold it fast;
Suffer me not to lose my way,
And bring me home at last."

But why need I enlarge? In one word you would have found "a church in the house," a christian home, a well ordered home, a cheerful, happy home.

Two days ago we saw those ministering hands folded motionless over a breast that, for fifty years had beat warmly towards the Eliot Church. She had sat by its cradle; she helped nourish it into manhood. For the goodly fellowship of this brotherhood, and for the place of former domestic enjoyments, she longed intensely. Amidst delirious wanderings the last few days, this was the one rational and most natural association. "Take me home," burst often and earnestly from her lips; "Jesus—thy staff," "Jesus, take me home." That dark valley passed through, she has now reached other Highlands than these. She is at home, and from that abode there issues the invitation to-day, "Come and see."